

move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Katherine A. Crytzer, of Tennessee, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Tennessee.

Mitch McConnell, James E. Risch, Mike Crapo, Roy Blunt, Shelley Moore Capito, Tom Cotton, John Cornyn, Chuck Grassley, Thom Tillis, Richard Burr, Pat Roberts, Cory Gardner, Lindsey Graham, Todd Young, Marco Rubio, John Boozman, John Barrasso.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PAUL). Without objection, it is so ordered.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, it is my understanding that the minority leader was going to be here, but we are getting very close to the time we actually cast our vote at 10:30—just 20 more minutes. In the event that the minority leader comes, I will dispense with my remarks and defer to him.

It is my honor to present the 60th annual National Defense Authorization Act. For 59 straight years—you can't say this about any other piece of legislation, all year or anytime, except the Defense authorization bill—we have passed this bill. We have passed this bill every year for 59 years, and this will be 60 years, and I anticipate that we will pass it now.

There isn't much that happens around the Capitol that has a track record like that. Maybe I am biased, and maybe in some people's minds I am wrong, but I think this is the most important bill of the year. I really believe that. I have believed that since 1987, and this is something that we have to do.

There is an old document nobody reads anymore called the Constitution. In there it tells us what we need to be doing, and that is exactly what we are going to be doing today: providing for our defense.

So it is simple what this bill does. It makes our country more secure. It supports our troops who defend it.

Right now this couldn't be more important. As President Trump's national defense strategy tells us, we are up against the most serious threats we have seen maybe forever. This is coming from China and Russia, these countries who stand against everything America stands for.

It bothers me that we went through the last 5 years of the Obama administration—that would have been from 2010 through 2015—where he criticized the military. We didn't have to have the military, he felt.

At this time, I would suspend with my remarks.

Mr. SCHUMER. You keep going for 2 minutes. I will let you know.

Mr. INHOFE. Let me know, and I will be glad to suspend.

Mr. SCHUMER. Thank you.

Mr. INHOFE. Anyway, during that time, during the Obama administration, during those 5 years, he reduced the funding for the military by 25 percent. Now, this has not happened, in my memory. It hasn't happened since World War II that we have gone through a 5-year period of doing that.

And the tragedy is that during that same time, China was increasing theirs by 83 percent. Stop and think about that—83 percent—when you realize that we were reducing our expenditures by 25 percent while they are increasing theirs by 83 percent. Now, that is serious enough, and that is something that is very much a concern to many of us.

So we know that they were increasing, we were decreasing, and, as a result, things happened. There are some things that they did—hypersonics, for example. That is one of the most recent exercises that is out there. They are actually, today, as we speak—they are ahead of us. Both China and Russia are ahead of the United States of America in hypersonics and that type of technology that is out there.

This President came along—and I know there is a lot of controversy about this bill. I know that the President wanted to have something in there that was having to do with language that had nothing to do with the military. I agree wholeheartedly with him, but you can't. You have got to have a defense authorization bill. Our kids in the field demand it.

With the NDAA, we are implementing the policies and programs to make sure that this doesn't happen, to ensure that America is able to prevent and, if necessary, win wars of today and tomorrow.

At this point, I would like to defer to the minority leader, and I do ask unanimous consent that at the conclusion of his remarks that I be recognized to make my remarks.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first, I want to thank the Senator from Oklahoma for, as usual, his courtesy, which I very much appreciate.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, the CARES Act passed the Senate on

March 27, 2020. It was a rare moment in bipartisanship—a legislative triumph that saved our country from disaster in the very early days of the pandemic. As you know, I sat and negotiated a great deal of that with Secretary of State Mnuchin. And we all agreed it did a lot of good—a lot of good. But, unfortunately, for the past 259 days, as the virus continued to spread—when we did the CARES Act, we thought, well, maybe COVID will be over by the summer. Everyone thought that, but obviously it wasn't. And so the virus has continued to spread. Thousands of small businesses have closed their doors for good. Tens of millions of Americans lost their jobs and livelihoods. As American families waited in 21st century bread lines, cars snaking for miles down American highways; as tens of millions of Americans fell behind on the rent and the mortgage and face eviction; as 15 million Americans got sick; and as 292,001 Americans died, the Senate Republican majority, led by the majority leader, made sure the Senate could not do anything of significance to help the American people.

May, June, July, August—pause; we don't need to do anything, said the leader. Let's wait and see what happens. Democrats didn't say that. The leader did. Waited and waited and waited. Now it is December, and we still, because of the leader's intransigence, have nothing of significance to help the American people during the worst economic crisis in 75 years and the greatest public health crisis in a century.

Why? Why can't we get together? Why can't there be the bipartisanship that Americans search for and yearn for? At a time of such great crisis, there is one reason why America's two major parties have not gotten together during the time of acute national emergency, and that is because the Republican leader has demanded a partisan poison pill—a sweeping corporate liability shield—be included in any legislation. Otherwise, he won't let it pass.

It sounds like an exaggeration, but that is what the leader has said. "We're not negotiating over liability protection," the leader said, on July 28.

I'll be responsible for putting the final agreement on the floor. And as I said, it will have liability protection in it. We're not negotiating with the Democrats over that.

That is the fact. That is the history. There is not equality here.

Finally, yesterday, as the bipartisan group of Senators and House Members were closing in on a final agreement, what happened? Yesterday, the Republican leader's team told the other congressional leaders that the bipartisan group would be unable to satisfy Senate Republicans. Why? Because it might not grant the exact sweeping liability protections for corporations that Leader McConnell has demanded. It is an unconscionable position. No relief for the American people unless corporations receive blanket immunity from lawsuits.

That particular poison pill that has foiled bipartisan agreement for more than 8 months is the nub of the problem. If we could just get past that, if the Republican leader would only back off maximalist demands on corporate immunity, we could get something done. I mean it. We could actually get something done.

Now, I know the Republican leader will say: Wait a minute, Democrats have partisan demands of their own, like providing assistance to save State and local services. But to equate State and local aid—money for policemen and firefighters, busdrivers, sanitation workers—to complete corporate immunity is a false equivalence. We know the two policies are not equivalent.

First of all, there is broad bipartisan support for State and local aid. It is not a Democratic demand. Many Republicans support it too. There are bipartisan bills on the floor of the Senate demanding \$500 billion in aid for the States. There are Governors—Democrats and Republicans—sending letters to all of us saying we need money; we need help. But the leader's corporate immunity provision doesn't have the support of a Democrat. Not a single person voted for it. It is expressly partisan. There is not equivalence.

I know the media likes to say, on the one hand, on the other. There is not equivalence here. One is helping people who desperately need help. The other is a partisan demand that has been around for a long time that simply does not get bipartisan support.

State and local aid is a solution to a real and urgent problem. Corporate immunity from lawsuits is not. They are not equivalent. State and local budgets are deeply in the red. Since the beginning of the pandemic, State and municipalities have laid off 1.3 million public employees—firefighters, police, first responders, teachers. We are talking about jobs—jobs—in red States as well as blue States.

The leader likes to cite one statistic about tax revenue in one blue State to argue that no State—no State deserves Federal aid, not Wyoming or Alaska, North Dakota, that have each seen sharp declines in tax revenue; not Florida or Nevada or Louisiana, that depend on tourism and face revenue declines of 10 percent or more.

State and local aid is a real and urgent problem. It is not abstract. It is people, and it is workers. PPP that helps small businesses—one of its main rationales, an important one, something I agree with—prevents workers who work for small businesses from being laid off. What is the difference between a worker being laid off by a small business because they don't have funding or a worker being laid off from a State and local government because they don't have funding? There is no difference. There is no difference.

The leader's corporate immunity provision, on the other hand, is a solution, ideological, in search of a problem. Almost a year into this pandemic—15

million Americans infected, 290,000 lives lost to COVID-19—there have been only 23 personal injury suits from exposure to the coronavirus—23 in the entire country, over the entire year. And that is why Senate Republicans can't reach a bipartisan agreement to help the unemployed, feed the hungry, fund a vaccine, or support our schools?

Corporations that want protection from a few dozen lawsuits is equivalent to millions of workers from State and local governments being laid off? Give me a break. Again, there are a few States that don't need the help, but many more States do—many more.

This is mind-boggling. The Republican leadership is blocking a solution for the entire country until they get a favor for corporations who don't even need it. The American people, all of us, are sick of this ridiculous gamesmanship by the majority leader.

We need to come together. We need to get something done. The American people deserve an outcome. It is not going to happen if the Republican majority insists on getting 100 percent of its partisan demands.

I yield the floor.

I, once again, thank the Senator from Oklahoma for his courtesy.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, first of all, I did want to get some final comments. I mentioned a minute ago and, of course, it is the right of the leaders—Democratic and Republican leaders—to have the first time. It is fine with me, but I just want to make one comment about it.

The minority leader was talking about what is going on right now and who would be favored and all that. I think one of the things we don't talk about, we should talk about. You know, I know the media doesn't like our President, and a lot of things he has done he didn't get credit for it.

One of the major things—and this is all going to come out—unfortunately, this didn't come out before the election, but it should have because there is—what do they call that? Warp speed? Is that right? Yes, this Operation Warp Speed. This was back in June. The President came out with this. General Perna was put in charge of it.

I wasn't prepared to talk about this, but I think it is important right now that we do because I want to follow up with what the minority leader talked about because everyone is concerned about it. They are all concerned about the coronavirus and those things. This has never happened in this country before. But it has happened. It had nothing to do with this administration. They did a great job. And to demonstrate what a great job they did, they had the Operation Warp Speed—this was back in June of this year—and they put General Perna in charge of it.

I chair the Senate Armed Services Committee. They wanted us to have a

hearing on this. I was so excited. No one could have sat through that hearing last June without coming to the conclusion that this thing is going to be behind us. We are winning this thing. And you come to the conclusion that we are going to have the virus under control. We are going to have this system. We all know that is happening today, right now, as we are speaking. We have several companies—five companies—who have come so close, and they are now distributing the necessary equipment so that people become immune to this thing. That is happening right now.

It happens that even though this was last June—it was last June that we had the hearing in my committee. Everything that they predicted, that General Perna predicted at that time, is happening. They said by December we would have it. Well, here it is, December, and we have got it. And then we said it is going to take about 3 months to be able to make the distribution around the country. And that time is coming up. It is getting close to that time, and that is going to happen. I mean, we are looking right now at April as the time that we have got this thing defeated. And right now, this administration—I want to give them credit for this. They have got this distribution system set up so it is going to be going around the country, and this thing is going to come to an end.

I have to tell you that the President is responsible for putting this in place, and it is, right now, on schedule.

I don't want to take a lot of time. I see that Senator REED has come in. Senator JACK REED is the ranking member on the Senate Armed Services Committee. Let me just tell you, I can't think of anyone I would rather have as a partner in putting together the Defense authorization bill—the most important bill of all year—than Senator JACK REED. He has been there by my side, with me, working together.

We had a Big 4 meeting. We always end up with a Big 4 meeting. To tell you what that is, that is the ranking Democrat and Republican in the House, the Democrat and Republican in the Senate; and the four of us get together and decide what are we going to do, what is this going to look like. And then we pass it. We passed this bill. It is a good bill. It is one that we have the opportunity to vote on today, the most important bill of the year. And if voting against it, you have to stop and think about those kids who are out there in harm's way and the threats that they are facing on a regular basis. This is a problem. This is a serious thing that is out there. I can't imagine wanting to have to face these people in the field, in harm's way, and say: Well, we didn't pass the Defense authorization bill.

We are going to pass it. These kids are going to get the right treatment that they need. They are going to get the resources they need. I did mention just a few minutes ago about the previous administration. I don't want people to misunderstand what I am saying.